

February 17, 2008

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Chairman Meyer, Chairman Roy and members of the Environment Committee.

I would like to speak in support of a program that provides assistance for Connecticut dairy farmers.

The last several years have been very hard for Connecticut dairy farmers. The price they have received for their milk has fluctuated and at times has been less than their cost of production. Some dairy farms have sold their cows and gone out of business while the others have struggled to find ways to make their farms viable. These farms are important to Connecticut not only because they supply fresh milk to the residents of the state, but they keep many acres of land open for the production of forage crops. Farm land is valuable to our local communities for aesthetic, economic, and environmental reasons.

The dairy industry is a billion dollar industry in the state of Connecticut. This not only includes the value of the milk produced but the value of the goods and services that they consume in production. This is no small number. I am the manager of Crop Production Services located in Broad Brook. Crop Production Services supplies farmers in the state with fertilizer, chemicals, seed and agronomic services for the production of a wide variety of crops. I have 16 employees on my payroll. The dairy industry is important to my business. In 2008, 35% of my revenues came from supplying products and services to the dairy industry. Seventy percent of the acres we service are for dairy farms. The health of the dairy industry is a concern to me because of the important roll it plays in the survival of agribusiness such as Crop Production Services in Connecticut.

Farmers have seen fertilizer costs increase 130% since January of 2000 and 32% since January of 2007. Seed, chemicals, energy and feed costs have also increased greatly during this period. The dairy farms have no control over the price of milk because it is set by the federal milk marketing orders. This leaves the farms with no way to recoup the increased cost of production.

I encourage the Connecticut legislature to help make dairy farms viable in the state. Viable dairy farms benefit local communities by supplying local fresh milk and maintaining open productive agricultural land. When a dairy farm goes out of business it is a major loss because they very rarely start up again and most of the land heads for development.

Thank you,

*William Syme*